

## Message Text

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ACTION AF-10

INFO OCT-01 ARA-10 EUR-12 ISO-00 IO-13 HA-05 CIAE-00

DODE-00 PM-05 H-01 INR-10 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05

PA-01 SP-02 SS-15 ICA-11 AID-05 /109 W

-----125926 021042Z /14

R 301340Z JUN 78

FM AMEMBASSY GABORONE

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2609

INFO AMEMBASSY DAR ES SALAAM

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY LUSAKA

AMEMBASSY MAPUTO

AMEMBASSY MOSCOW

AMEMBASSY PRETORIA

USMISSION USUN

USINT HAVANA

C O N F I D E N T I A L GABORONE 2043

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINS PINT UR CU BC

SUBJ: BNF REPLY TO GOB LIFTING OF PASSPORTS OF WOULD-BE HAVANA

YOUTH FESTIVAL ATTENDEES

REF: (A) STATE 162867, (B) GABORONE 1997

BEGIN UNCLASSIFIED.

1. AS REPORTED JUNE 29 DAILY NEWS, BOTSWANA NATIONAL FRONT (BNF) OPPOSITION PARTY MEMBERS HAVE DENIED GOB CHARGES THAT SOME OF THE WOULD-BE DELEGATES TO CUBA WOULD UNDERGO MILITARY TRAINING IN ANOTHER COUNTRY AFTER THE FESTIVAL.

2. RESPONDING TO THE TEMPORARY WITHDRAWAL OF 17 BNF MEMBERS' PASSPORTS, THE BNF ANNOUNCED DURING A SERIES OF POLITICAL RALLIES THAT THE ISSUE HAD BEEN TAKEN UP WITH THE GOVERNMENT.  
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THE SPEAKERS, INCLUDING BNF PRESIDENT DR. KENNETH KOMA AND GENERAL SECRETARY MR. MARELEDI GIDDIE, ALLEGED THE GOB WAS ATTEMPTING TO DISCREDIT THE BNF.

3. ACCORDING TO THE BNF LEADERS, THEIR PARTY IS NOT INTERESTED IN "OVERTHROWING THE GOVERNMENT". THEY ALSO NOTED THAT COUPS GENERALLY STAGED BY THOSE WITHIN THE RULING HIERARCHY. END

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4. BBC STRINGER, DEREK JAMES, TOLD EMBOFF JUNE 30 THAT BNF MEMBERS INFORMED HIM IN HIS HOME THAT ROUTE THEY INTENDED TO TAKE TO HAVANA WAS NOT DIRECT CHARTER FLIGHT FROM LUSAKA, AS THE PARTY ALLEGES, BUT AEROFLOT FLIGHT TO MOSCOW, THROUGH TO ODESSA (PRESUMABLY FOR SOME ORIENTATION) AND ON TO HAVANA. IN ADDITION TO DR. KOMA, BNF GROUP INCLUDED BOTH PARTY GENERAL SECRETARY GIDDIE AND THE VICE PRESIDENT. IN LUSAKA, BNF MEMBERS WERE TO JOIN FRELIMO, PATRIOTIC FRONT AND MPLA DELEGATIONS FOR ONWARD FLIGHT. ACCORDING TO JAMES, BNF MEMBERS DENIED PLANS FOR VIOLENT OVERTHROW OF GOB, BUT ONE CONCEDED (BNF PUBLICITY AND PROGRAM CHAIRMAN) THAT IF PEACEFUL METHODS FAILED THE PARTY WOULD CONSIDER VIOLENCE. IN THIS REGARD, JAMES TOLD EMBOFF HE HAD ASKED GOB CABINET SECRETARY STEENKAMP FOR HIS VIEWS ON THE PASSPORT AFFAIR. STEENKAMP RESPONDED SIMPLY BUT EMOTIONALLY: "HOW WOULD YOU LIKE TO BE ON THEIR (BNF) LIST?" NOTE: EMBASSY HAS NO EVIDENCE THAT BNF "HIT LIST" ACTUALLY EXISTS.

5. COMMENT: BNF SPOKESMEN SOMEWHAT SURPRISINGLY DID NOT TAKE THE OFFENSIVE WITH CHARGES THAT TEMPORARY WITHDRAWAL OF PASSPORTS ILLUSTRATED LACK OF FREEDOM AND DEMOCRACY IN BOTSWANA. HOWEVER, ISSUE IS SURE TO BE RAISED AT NEXT SESSION OF PARLIAMENT DUE TO OPEN JULY 12. IN FACT, EXTAFF MINISTER MOGWE TOLD

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THE AMBASSADOR THAT GOB ITSELF WOULD PROMOTE FULL PARLIAMENTARY DISCUSSION OF INCIDENT IN ORDER TO DEMONSTRATE THAT GOB ACTIONS WERE APPROPRIATE AND RESTRAINED RESPONSE TO ALLEGED BNF SUBVERSIVE ACTIVITIES. OPPOSITION (PARTICULARLY BNF) PARLIAMENTARIANS WILL NO DOUBT CHARGE GOB WITH VIOLATION OF ITS CITIZENS' RIGHT TO TRAVEL ON TRUMPED-UP NATIONAL SECURITY GROUNDS.

6. POSSIBLY MOST INTERESTING ASPECT OF COMING DEBATE WILL BE PARLIAMENTARY HANDLING OF SOVIET CONNECTION. GOB LEADERS IN PARLIAMENT ARE LIKELY TO AVOID DIRECT CRITICISM OF SOVIET EMBASSY IN ACCORDANCE WITH BOTSWANA'S PROFESSED NON-ALIGNED POSTURE AND THEIR USUAL PRACTICE OF AVOIDING PUBLIC DIPLOMATIC CONTROVERSY. HOWEVER, ENTHUSIASTIC BACKBENCHERS FROM RULING BOTSWANA DEMOCRATIC PARTY (BDP) MAY WELL TAKE ADVANTAGE OF CHANCE TO TAKE POT SHOT AT WELL-KNOWN SOVIET CONNECTION OF BOTSWANA'S MOST VOCIFEROUS OPPOSITION PARTY.

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## Message Attributes

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